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President Sassou in the U.S.

¶11. (U) President Denis Sassou Nguesso and a large delegation of sixty arrived in New York on September 17. Sassou, First Lady Antoinette, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Forestry, the Minister of the Environment and 25 others travelled on a chartered plane via Cape Verde.

¶12. (U) In his role as Climate Change Spokesman for the African Union, Sassou has been pushing hard for Africa and the ROC in particular to get their slice of the carbon pie in Copenhagen. Sassou's DC lobbying firm Chlopak, Leonard, Schlechter & Associates have helped Sassou make a full-court press on American audiences with the launch a snazzy new English website (congo-brazzaville.org, on which President Sassou recently posted an open letter to President Obama on the subject of the environment) and a well-placed editorial with a Sassou byline in the Boston Globe just days before Sassou's speech to the General Assembly on September 25. The leitmotif of the website, editorial, and UNGA address has been that Africa and the Congo will not just be the victims of climate change, they can also be

"part of the solution" given the Congo Basin's importance as the world's "second lung" for absorbing carbon (along with the "first lung", the Amazon rainforest).

¶3. (SBU) Sassou did not waste any time in moving forward on other issues on the margins of this year's General Assembly, reportedly meeting with South African President Jacob Zuma to work out the details of a pending farm deal to lease large tracts of Congo farmland to South African farmers. The deal had been stalled due to the Presidential election in Congo and some counterproductive statements by the leader of Agri SA, the South African consortium in charge of the deal. The final details of the deal have yet to emerge, but now that the Presidents have met, the agreement is reportedly back on track and could be sealed before the end of the year. On October 5, Sassou will be joining his favorite son, Denis Christel, in Houston for meetings between Congo's National Oil Company, SNPC, and several U.S. energy companies. According to Denis Christel, he and his father will meet with Mercuria Trading (a subsidiary of Conoco-Phillips), Marathon, and Sun Energy while in Houston.

"Gorilla-cide" Report Discredited

¶4. (SBU) As reported by several international media outlets, a recent study by San Francisco-based Endangered Species International (ESI) reported that two gorillas are killed each week and sold as bush meat in Pointe Noire. Local wildlife NGOs agree that the illicit trade in bush meat, including gorilla, is a major problem in the Pt. Noire area, but dispute the

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scientific basis of the findings. According to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Country Director, the ESI representative spent less than two weeks in the ROC and ESI has no staff or offices in the ROC. The President of ESI is also quoted by the BBC as saying that "enforcement does not exist." Recent local media reports confirmed by the WCS, however, highlight successful enforcement operations against poachers and bush meat vendors in the Sangha province, as well successful prosecutions (supported by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Funding) against protected species vendors in Brazzaville.

Efforts to Track Lumber Exports

¶5. (U) The Republic of Congo signed a service contract with Societi Ginirale de Surviellance (SGS) on September 2 to promote sustainable management of forests by creating a verification system to track lumber exported to EU and other destinations. Under this system, timber would be marked with a code at the point of origin, similar to systems currently in place in other countries. (Note: SGS is a Swiss company, which according to its website offers inspection, testing and verification services across a variety of sectors including agricultural, industrial, minerals and oil, gas and chemicals, among others. End note.) Henri Djombo, Minister of Forest Economy, signed the agreement with Alain Verney, the director of SGS. The project reportedly will be financed with a 2 million Euro contribution from the EU as well as 1.8 million Euros from the Republic of Congo. This new system will be implemented over the next three years and should provide a method for greater accountability in logging markets. Post will provide additional reporting on the implementation of this agreement septel.

Government Restricts Movement of Opposition Politicians

¶6. (SBU) The government has recently restricted the movement of several opposition politicians, and police have been questioning opposition leaders to gather information about an "illegal" opposition press conference on July 15, just after the July 12 elections. The details of the incident, which involved police firing, remain sketchy, but according to some observers a policeman shot into the crowd of opposition protestors, narrowly missing opposition leader Mathias Dzon. However, the police claim that the shot was fired by one of Dzon's bodyguards, themselves government agents provided for candidate security. Two bystanders were injured in the shooting incident. Congolese human rights organization OCDH points out that the government wants to shift blame for the shooting incident to the opposition, and is now using the incident to suppress the opposition and restrict their travel. Several notable politicians have been prevented from traveling in recent weeks, including former Prime Minister Ange Edourd Poungui and Secretary General of the opposition party UPADS Pascal Tsaty Mabiala, who were attempting to travel from Brazzaville to Dolisie on September 4. The opposition sent an open letter to President Sassou on September 18 protesting the restrictions on their movements. The letter was published in several local newspapers.

Highway Project Between Congo and Cameroon

¶7. (U) On September 26, 2009 the Board of the African Development Bank (AFDB) approved a financial package worth USD 190 million for the creation of a road to link Congo and Cameroon. When completed, the 500-kilometer Ketta-Djoum Road will substantially improve the 1,612-kilometer highway connecting the two capital cities of Brazzaville and Yaounde. AFDB funding includes a grant of \$97 million USD and a loan of \$93 million USD. In addition to aiding the movement of people and goods between Congo and Cameroon, the project will improve

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access to areas with significant economic potential in agriculture, ore, and timber in northern Congo.

Developments in the Mining Industry

¶8. (U) MagMinerals Potasse Congo, a subsidiary of MagIndustries Corp., is building a pipeline to bring natural gas to a potash production site near Djeno, a suburb of Pointe-Noire (the large coastal port city). The company plans to produce 600,000 tons of potash per year once the site is fully functional. This site will reportedly make Congo the leading African producer of potash and the fourth producer worldwide after Canada, Russia, Byelorussia and Brazil. Also in the potash sector, Australian-owned Element Minerals (ELM) received a boost in share price after its acquisition of the Sintoukoula potash project, located 50 km from Pointe Noire. In other mining news, the Canadian company DMC mining recently acquired a large iron ore project located near an existing railway line that would be

used to haul the ore to the coast.

Smear Campaign Against President Biya of Cameroon

¶ 9. (SBU) In September 2009, a local bi-weekly known as "Le Choc" published its first "Special Edition" devoted among other things to a public smear campaign against President Biya of Cameroon. According to Cameroonian Ambassador Komidor, this campaign stems from a negative story written about President Sassou-Nguesso in September's edition of AfriqEducation. AfriqEducation is published by Paul Tdega, a Cameroonian national residing in France. Apparently, Tdega was under contract to publish positive stories on Sassou in his magazine. With the recent ministerial reshuffle in Congo, however, Tdega lost his contract and in retaliation, published a story denouncing corruption within the ROC's leadership. Komidor maintains that Cameroon played no role in the AfriqEducation article criticizing Sassou Nguesso. The Ambassador claims, however, that the recent smear campaign in Le Choc was directly organized by the Special Advisor to President Sassou Nguesso, Jean Dominique Okemba. As proof, the Ambassador demonstrated how Le Choc had doctored photos to invent a relationship between Tdega and President Biya. The Ambassador also pointed out that this was the first Special Edition of Le Choc and implied that the only source of money that could convert a black and white bi-weekly into a glossy magazine edition would have had to have come from the Presidency.

¶ 10. (SBU) Comment: This latest spat comes in the wake of another dispute between Cameroon and the ROC over the arrest and supposedly unlawful detention of a Cameroonian diplomat working at the Central African Regional Development Bank (BDEAC). Ambassador Komidor was visibly agitated when describing the "Le Choc" article and said he would take his complaint to the highest levels of the ROC leadership. Together, these events may point to a brewing struggle between Presidents Biya and Sassou-Nguesso for leadership in the Central African Region. End comment.

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